

Sports cars

# THE SKY FOR A ROOF... FOR VIPS

The Cisitalia 202 Cabriolet  
was one of the most beautiful cars of its time.  
Its owners included Henry Ford II.

by Nino Balestra

The echo of the sporting successes of its racing cars had not yet died away when Cisitalia showed the road version of these racers on the eve of the 1947 Italian Grand Prix (which took place that year in the avenues of the Milan Fiera). It was a splendid coupé, masterfully put together by Pinin Farina (it was only in 1961 that the then President of the Republic, Giovanni Gronchi, joined Pininfarina's name together), unusually smooth and polished and with an incredibly low-slung height of only 1260 mm.

This car was greeted and assessed very warmly from the outset. The coupé was shown some weeks later at the Villa d'Este Concorso d'Eleganza and then at the

Paris Motor Show and the Bodywork Show held in Milan in November.

An open-top version was also on the drawing board throughout that winter. The initial choice had been to adapt the classic spyder 202 SMM (known officially at that time as the "Nuvolari") by making it mellower, with larger doors and a windscreen of acceptable dimensions. The new road version was to be completed by English-style sides and a hood.

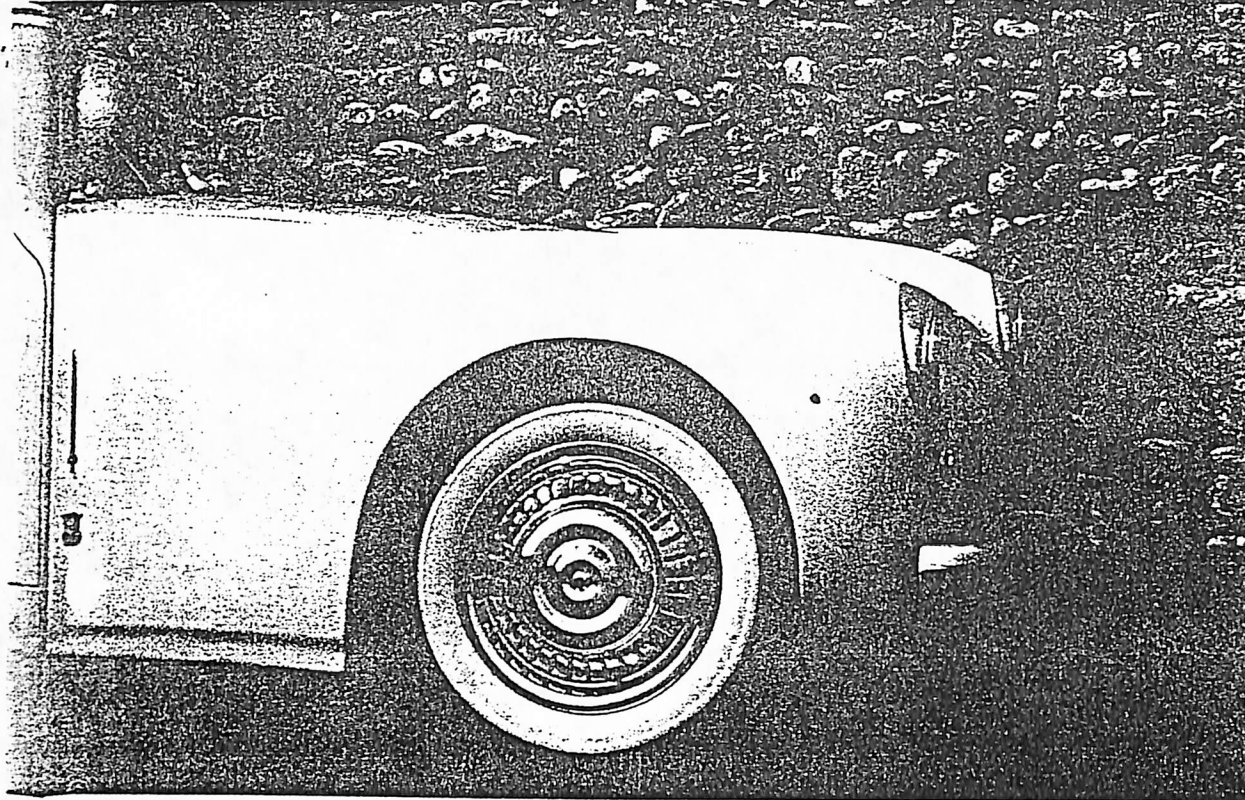
## Derived from the coupé

However, after careful thought, Cisitalia realized that this idea would not satisfy the tastes of potential customers. People who loved racing would buy the fast and

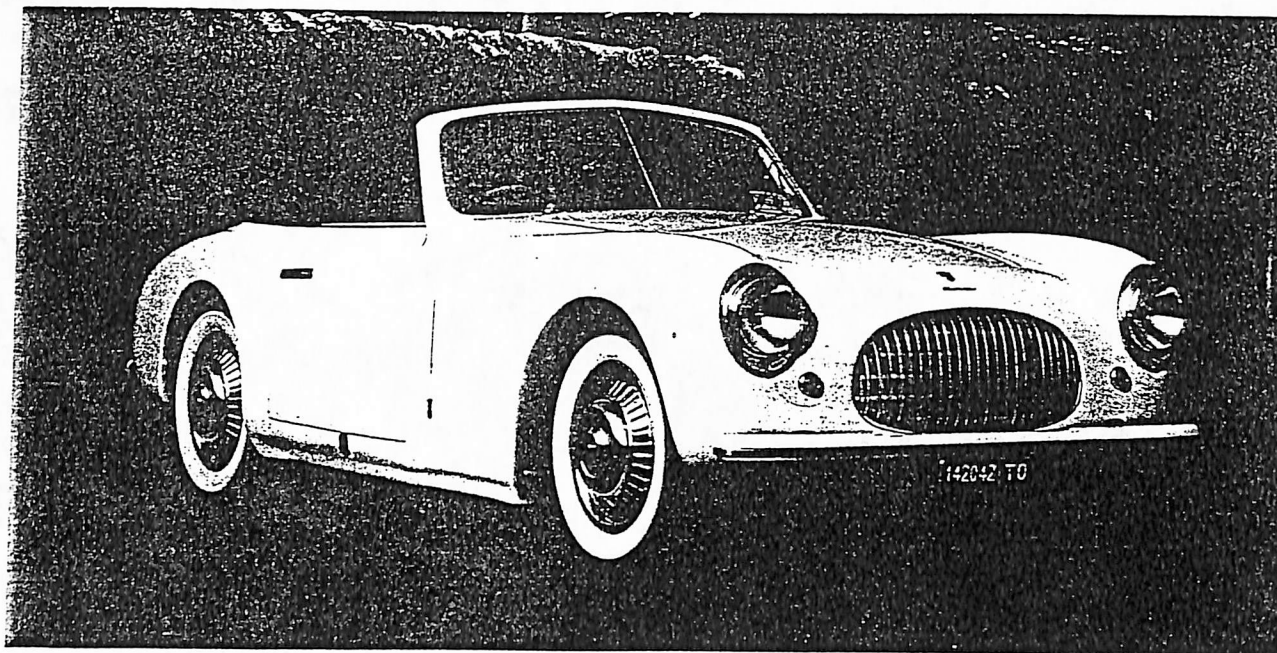
streamlined Nuvolari spyder and not the "domesticated" version. The sophisticated and elegant driver would not, however, be likely to find the somewhat spartan car derived from the racing spyder to his taste.

This led immediately to the idea of developing a cabriolet model directly from Pinin Farina's 202 coupé version.

This rapid cosmetic operation was again the work of Pinin Farina and, even though the reworking of such perfect lines was no easy task, the result was very satisfactory, providing a genuine cabriolet with flowing and soft lines, a hermetically sealed hood, handle-operated windows, very luxurious fittings which were up to the stan-



*The Cisitalia 202 cabriolet, thanks to its soft and flowing lines and its very luxurious finish, soon became a fashionable car. The most famous of its purchasers included Henry Ford II and Roberto Rossellini. Below, the Pinin Farina design is highlighted with the hood down.*



dard of the coupé and acceptable luggage space. All in all, it was a genuine touring car.

This beautiful car was an immediate success. A ruby red model kept Italy's breath bated as the co-star of the romantic Love Story which accompanied Roberto Rossellini and Ingrid Bergman from one end of the peninsula to the other. Henry Ford II, the car industry magnate from Detroit, chose a pale grey model.

The cabriolet consequently became fashionable, one of the most sought-after cars of the "beau

monde" which had not at that time become the jet-set. A total of some 60 cabriolets and a hundred or so coupés were built, although the forecast was four hundred.

Difficulties in obtaining supplies and organising labour, together with a period of serious industrial unrest, placed Cisitalia in difficulties and ended up by destroying Piero Dusio's empire.

Born in Scurzolengo d'Asti in 1899, Dusio had made his way up through the textile industry, obtaining the Italian patent for oil-cloth.

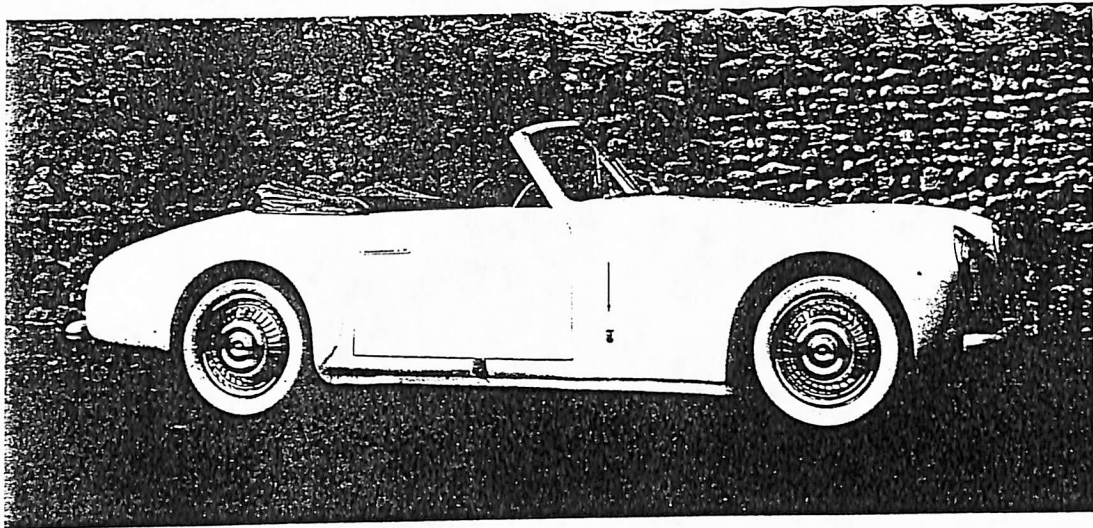
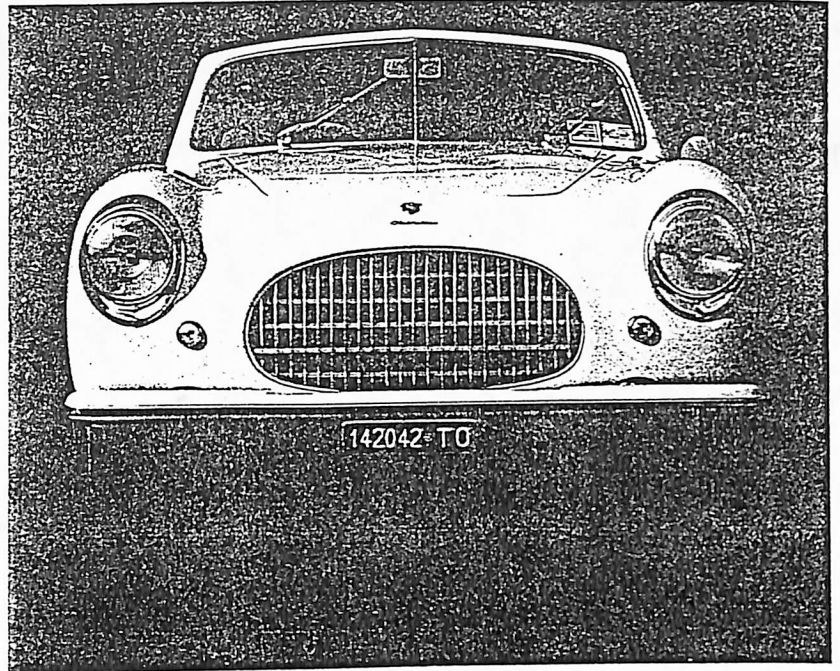
Dusio was an enthusiastic sportsman who was an excellent driver and in the pre-war period had his own team, the Scuderia Torino, which included the powerful Alfa Romeo 8C and single-seater Maseratis. Dusio took an active part in racing, achieving excellent results and taking part in ten or so Grand Prix, coming in first overall in his "little" Cisitalia single seater in its debut in the Valentino di Torino Grand Prix in September 1946. At the end of the war, following contacts with the engineer Dante Giacosa, Dusio converted

the mechanical engineering division of Cisitalia (Italian Industrial Sports Company) into Cisitalia Cars.

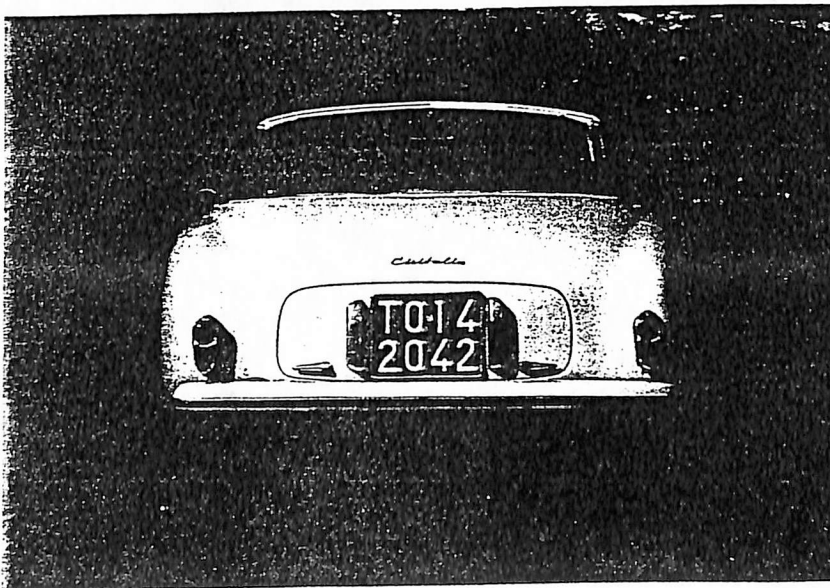
The idea was to present, when the war was over, a completely new mass-produced racing car, suitable for a fair contest between the great champions of the wheel.

When the time was ripe, the project was put into action.

A light and strong chassis, with a genuinely revolutionary tubular framework, was chosen on which simple mechanics, largely derived from Fiat mass production, could be installed. In practice, use was made of the 1100 engine and the Topolino suspension.



*At the top, the front with the 23-spoke grille of the first version. Alongside, the low profile of the 202 Cabrioler (only 1230mm). At the bottom, the car's tail with a thin bumper, which was also a feature of the first version.*

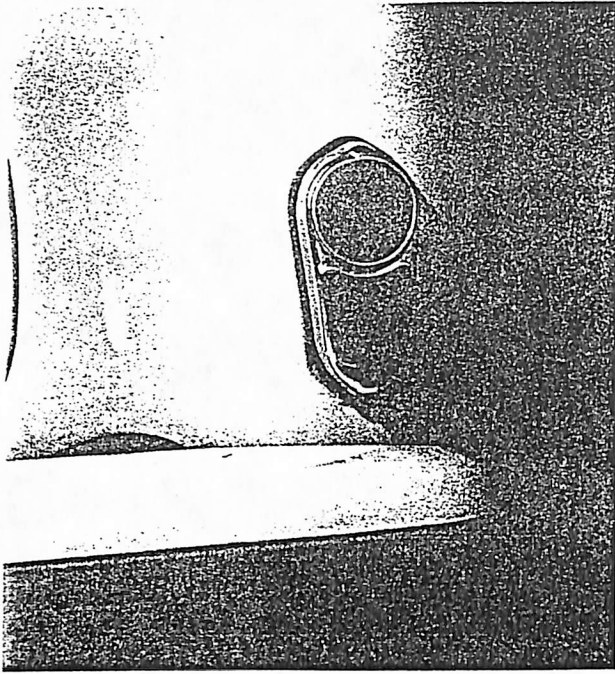


The small and fast Cisitalia "D46" (an abbreviation of Dusio 1946) immediately made its mark in the racing world, dominating its debut race which the "boss", Piero Dusio, won.

In the wake of this success, it was decided to build a two-seater sports version based on the same technical and construction criteria.

The mechanical components, appropriately dimensioned, of the single-seater were installed on the modern and rigid chassis and framework. Almost immediately 60 hp was obtained from the engine: this was powerful at that time in comparison with the 32 supplied by the mass-produced Fiat 1100.

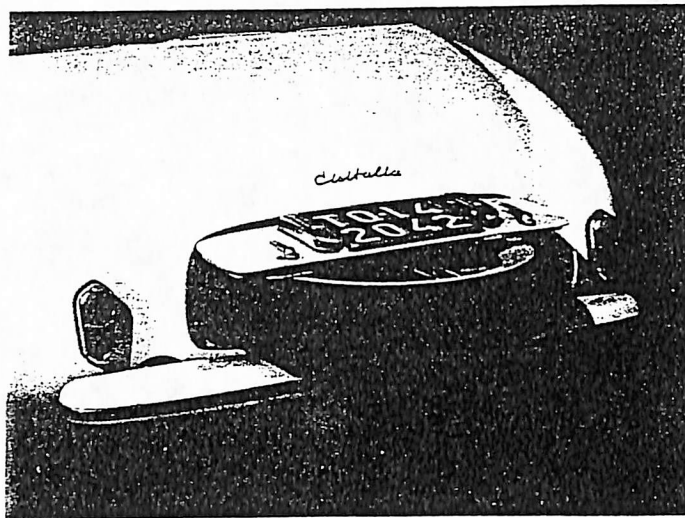
## SPORTS CARS



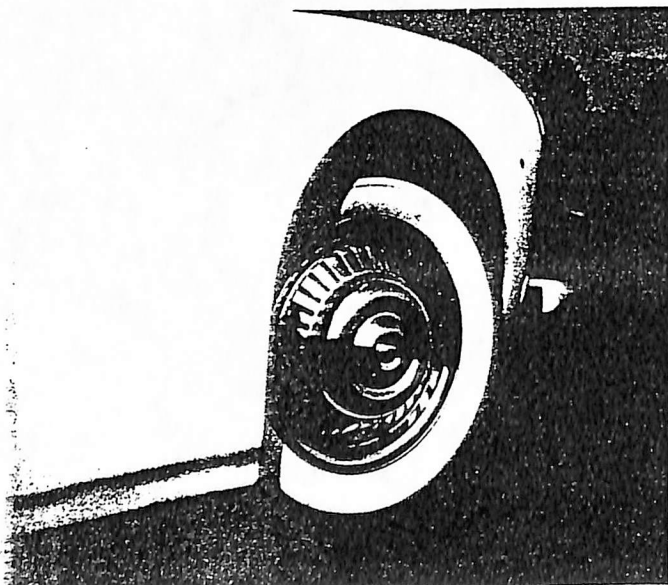
*Cisitalia*

Two coupés and three spyders set off on the adventure of the first Mille Miglia after the war. The 1823 kilometre route was along the roads of an Italy which had been devastated and mutilated. The Cisitalia behaved astonishingly. Nuvolari was the first to reach Rome in front of the "fox", Biondetti, driving an 8-cylinder Alfa Romeo coupé 2900. The two champions fought hard over the Apennines and Nuvolari's lead on board the little Cisitalia spyder was further increased.

Unfortunately a violent down-pour affected his car's ignition and Nuvolari came in second at Brescia just behind Biondetti.



At the top, a detail of the tail-light and the Cisitalia trademark. The shield-shaped light originally housed the reversing light. Now it acts as a blinker. Left, the original location of the spare wheel.



*Detail of the chromium-plated wheel rims with a 15" radius. The 202 Cabriolet used white-walled 5.00 x 15 tyres.*

For Cisitalia however, this was a triumph, since its three surviving cars were in second, third and fourth places. Then came the Formula One adventure. This featured a futuristic car with a rear-mounted engine designed by Ferdinand Porsche which, together with a series of unfortunate events, played its part in the firm's downfall. Dusio moved to Argentina to start a new company, the "Autoar" (Automotores Argentinos), while his son, Carlo, stayed behind in Italy. The latter produced a number of interesting prototypes, some for Ford, until the realistic decision was finally taken to put an end to the motor vehicle adventure at the beginning of the 1970s.

The beautiful 202 cabriolet ▶

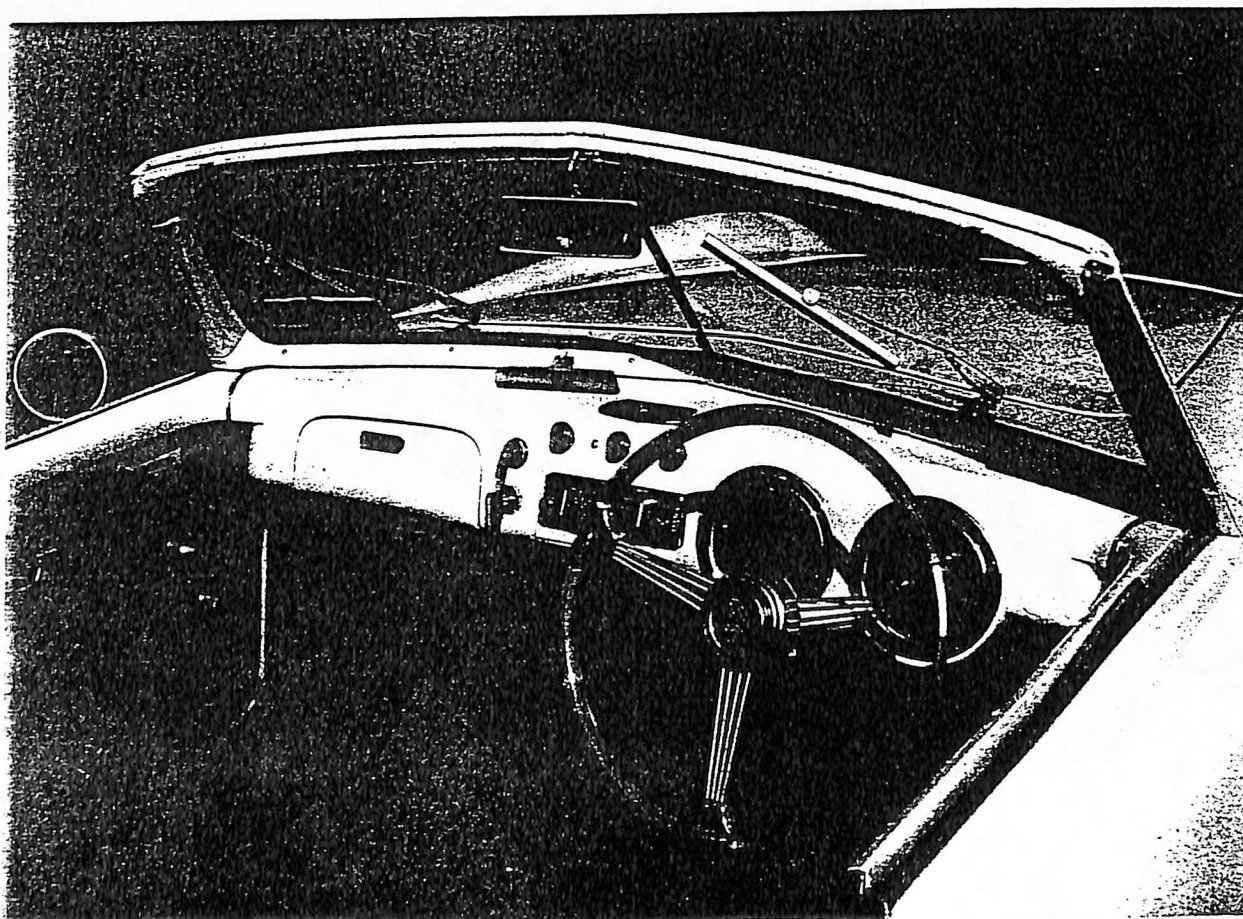
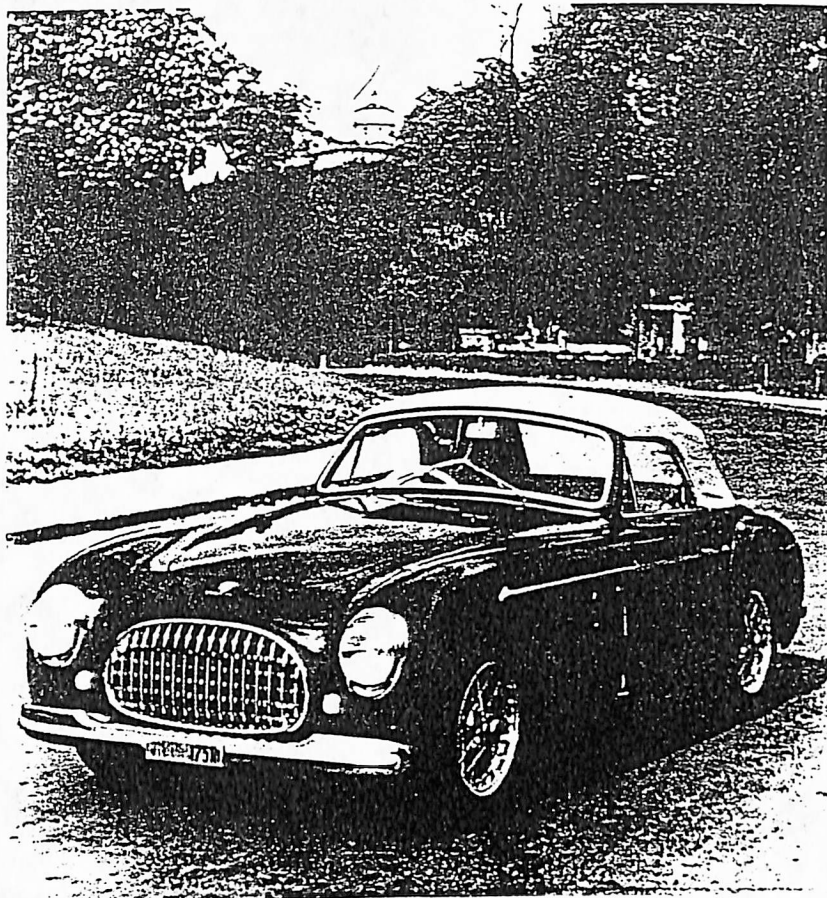
## SPORTS CARS

dates from this period. It was a sophisticated car which was designed by Pinin Farina and immediately contracted out to the Farina and Vignale coachbuilding works. Only the first model (frame 021) was actually built by Pinin Farina and of the 34 cabriolets surveyed, out of a total of 85 surviving models of the 202, one was by Pinin Farina, two were custom built by Castagna and one by Frua, while 19 originated from the Farina works and eight from Vignale. The paternity of the other three is uncertain. There are almost no differences between the two different productions. There are small details in the upholstery seams and some variations in the line of the door frames, in the same way as the coupés distributed between the three Turin coachbuilders.

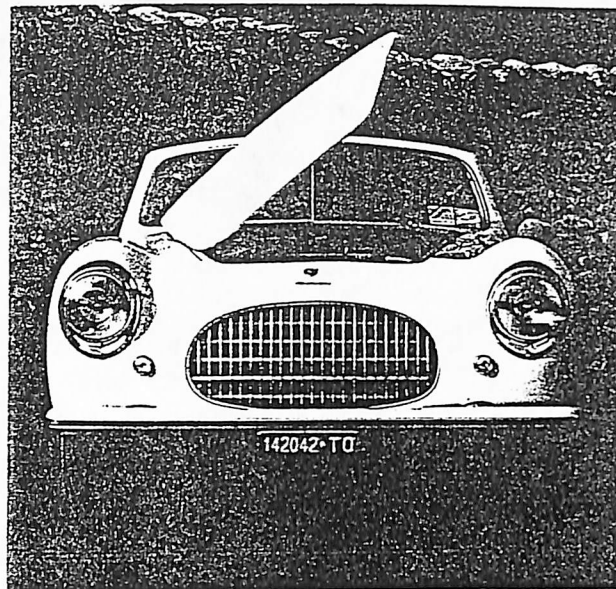
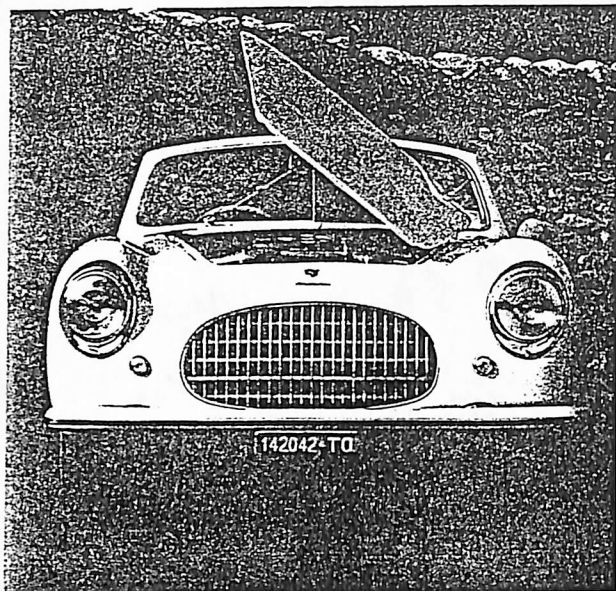
### Small changes

Over the three years of production (1948-50 with a few models being produced subsequently) the car underwent small changes of detail and development which it would be more appropriate to call simple updating.

Single and twin carburettor en-



*Top, a later model of the Cisitalia 202. The windscreen is in one piece, the grille has 17 spokes and the bumper is larger and chromium-plated. Left, the sporty elegance of the interior with its three-spoke steering wheel. On the following page, at the top, the 202 bonnet opened from either side.*



gines were fitted, the steering box was replaced and the dashboard was modified. The body, in parallel with the coupé, evolved slightly, with the mudguards and sides becoming slightly more inflated and rounded.

About 100 models had been produced when the most significant change in its appearance was made. The front two-piece windscreen was replaced by a single curved windscreen and the front grille with 23 thin aluminium spokes was replaced by a different grille in chromium-plated brass with 17 spokes and the light bumper,

per, painted the same colour as the car body, made way for a larger, chromium-plated bumper.

In substance, the 202 was made to look heavier and both the coupé and the cabriolet lost a little of their lightness and flowing design.

The range of colours available for the cabriolet was pleasant and modern, ranging from pure white to ivory as well as blue, black, ruby red, mid-grey, metallic pale blue and metallic green.

### Eternal youth

A pleasing car which has possibly aged better than its sister

coupé over the years, it is a modern and pleasant car to drive even in city traffic.

With its very effective drum brakes, its low but comfortable driving position and its 55 hp engine, it can still move today at 150 km/h provided that the driver is familiar with unsynchronized and rather slow gears.

However, its real "fans" drive it at 70 km/h with the hood down: the engine purrs silently, the wind blows gently through their hair and the "Cisi" loses itself in the peaceful green of the countryside. ■

## Technical Specifications

## Cisitalia 202 SC Cabriolet

**Engine:** Front-mounted, 4 cylinders in-line, water cooled.

**Bore and stroke:** 68 x 75 mm

**Cubic capacity:** 1089 cm<sup>3</sup>

**Power:** 55 hp at 5500 rpm.

**Fuel Supply:** 1 or 2 Weber 36 DR+SP carburetors

**Lubrication:** Dry casing, side oil tank, front radiator

**Ignition:** Battery coil

**Drive:** Rear-axle

**Transmission:** single dry plate clutch, 4 gears - reverse

**Chassis:** Tubular framework in molybdenum chrome

**Brakes:** hydraulic drum

**Front suspension:** Independent with lower triangles and transverse leaf-spring

**Rear suspension:** rigid axle and two longitudinal leaf springs

**Shock absorbers:** Telescopic hydraulic shock absorbers, 2 at the front and 4 at the rear

**Span:** 2400 mm

**Gauge:** front, 1258 mm, rear, 1247 mm

**Length:** 3400 mm

**Width:** 1450 mm

**Height:** 1230 mm

**Weight:** 765 kg

**Top speed:** 155 km/h

**Production period:** 1984-1952

